



# **The Jamaican Artists and Craftsman Guild**

Website:

***jamaicaguil dofartists.com***

**Website Final Report  
Sponsored by the USAID**

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# **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Jamaica Artist and Craftman's Guild is an independent body established to represent all Jamaican artists who wish to be members; it is therefore “all-inclusive,” reflecting the styles, cultures, and disciplines of artists from varying backgrounds and training. The art represented by the Guild, is considered to have an authentic Jamaican voice; in recent years, it has impressed the local and international community, which has been evidenced by sales.

The Guild was established in 1977 and has been strengthened over the years by the assistance of a growing membership, now totaling one hundred and thirty members. Despite this, it has been limited in its achievements because it relies solely on voluntary help from members who are not able to effectively function as artists as well as dealers and managers.

The role of the Guild can basically be described as three-fold: educational, promotional and welfare. It seeks to address the professional economic and social concerns of artists.

## **2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE GUILD**

It has always been difficult for artists to market their work and support their creative development individually. Resources are generally too limited to permit paying for experienced agents to negotiate business for them, or to permit adequate expenditure on promoting themselves. In 1977, a group of artists decided to band together to undertake these functions. The cooperative venture was dubbed the Jamaican Artists and Craftsmen's Guild. The late artist Ralph Campbell spearheaded the Guild's formation and became its first President, with Alexander Cooper as Vice President.

The major function of the JACG was to support the development of members' art through workshops and educational programs; and to assist in marketing members' art. Initially, an organizing manager looked after the daily operations of the Guild. One function was to manage the Mutual Life Gallery, which was a gift to the artist community – through the JACG – from the former Mutual Life Insurance Company.

For much of the 1980's and 1990's the Guild was dysfunctional, but has now gathered momentum in recent years, following a series of changes in the art market in Jamaica. Currently there are more artists in Jamaica today, operating against the background of a contracting economy. This has compelled the Guild to regroup and launch itself into the international marketing of Jamaican art as part of its strategy to penetrate new markets and gain financial growth for its members.

The Guild's objectives have further expanded to address welfare needs, copyright protection, the removal of aesthetic discrimination and other broad concerns of its members while promoting and fostering a spirit of solidarity and integration among artists.

### **1) Background of the Jamaican art market**

More people are now engaged in making art a profession than at any other time in our history. However, while conditions have improved for the more widely acclaimed masters, newly emerging talent has found access to the mainstream art world very difficult.

There are more persons collecting original artwork for homes and offices than before. Although the interest of collectors has been growing, their approach has been cautious, tending to support the more established artists rather than taking a chance on newer talent. This tendency arises from the collectors taking their cues from the local galleries and art shops.

In the past, major collectors of Jamaican art have been financial institutions such as banks, building societies and insurance companies. With the economic recession and the near collapse of the financial services sector, institutional buying has reduced significantly, causing the art market to contract. With the demise of many of these companies, their art collections, considerable in many cases, have been re-introduced into the market via auctions or other reduced price sales, with further negative effects. Art is especially vulnerable to shifts (rise or fall) in the overall economy and the market has thus become erratic and unpredictable, causing frustration and disappointment to many artists.

The process of making art has become more complicated, characterized by new ideas and approaches, including computer generated art, graffiti, assemblages and diverse three-dimensional forms.

All these factors have caused the art market to become more complex. Even curators and seasoned collectors are re-examining their own attitudes to art. Given the complex nature of the art world today, there needs to be a different and more innovative approach to marketing local art. A major shortcoming in the art market is that too little effort is directed at encouraging non-collectors to acquire original artwork. Therefore, promotional campaigns geared to tapping this market segment are necessary. So too is a strategy for increasing sales by penetrating new markets, especially the vast international market.

Another shortcoming of the art market in Jamaica is the debilitating internal schisms fracturing the local art fraternity. The situation has caused considerable ill will and mistrust between artists, galleries and collectors. Artists feel that there has been a distortion of the perception of Jamaican art, which has created by dealers who are often biased to certain types of styles and media, encouraging aesthetic discrimination.

**Many artists continue to have difficulty in exhibiting and selling their work. There are too few galleries to accommodate the number of artists producing and sales often bring very small returns to artists. Very few artists in Jamaica are able to earn sufficient income from the sale of their art not to need additional jobs to supplement their income. Many of them earn less in their lifetime from art than most other professional workers earn from their careers. There has been little public or private sector initiative to assist the sector, despite the economic potential of Jamaica's artistic assets.**

**These considerations are largely behind the Guild's decision to extend its objectives beyond its education and welfare role and to focus more on the economic and financial benefits of selling and promoting Jamaican art locally and internationally. The Guild feels that this will ensure the long-term viability and development of Jamaican art and keep Jamaican artists in business. It has therefore concentrated its energy on what it needs to do, to advance economic development of the sector and the art careers of its members.**

There is also a growing interest in Caribbean art. The art of Haiti has long been recognized internationally. The art of Cuba is gaining international recognition now that Cuba is opening up her shores to tourists. Jamaican art, similarly, is beginning to be noticed.

The Guild feels that the Caribbean public and private sectors must begin to prepare the ground for the eventual artistic economic harvest. However, until this happens the Guild will play its role, by the successfully implementing projects such as this. The Jamaican Artists & Craftsmen's Guild recognizes that Jamaican art has thrived over the years and has produced artists whose talents have been recognized locally and internationally. However, there has been a slow awakening, generally, to the economic potential of Jamaica's artistic assets.

## **2) JACG's Present Role in the Art Community**

The JACG was set up as an independent body to represent all Jamaican artists. The organization is therefore 'all-inclusive.' As such, it will at any time reflect the synthesis of styles, cultures and disciplines of artists from varying backgrounds, from the masters of fine arts to the intuitive and from the established artist to the recent art school graduate.

The role of the JACG can basically be described as three-fold **educational, promotional and welfare.**

The Website sponsored by The USAID project addresses one of the goals set by the JACG, that of promotion.

## **3.The USAID Project**

### **1) Goal**

**To put Jamaican art on the international map and accrue financial and other benefits for members . This project exposes Jamaican art and artist to the global marketplace, and therefore expands the economic base from which the artist can earn. The overall contribution of the website will also serve to open the eyes of the public and private sector to the full economic potential of Jamaican Art. To this end the website sponsored by USAID gives the Jamaican artist an international presence in an arena which uses technology in a most efficient and cost effective way to achieve the intended goal.**

### **2) Project Achievement**

**The website was designed by:** Digital Technology, Inc.  
Suite 8  
137 Maxfield Ave.  
Kingston 10, Jamaica, WI.

The following outlines the areas covered by the Website

- Brief History of the Guild
- MENU: -artists space for article publishing.
- Gallery current art work by the artists
- Artist Listing: With biographies
- Contacting the Guild

- Setting up a e-commerce account
- Guild News
- Membership application and requirements
- Submitting work on the site for sale
- Links with Galleries
- Information about the Jamaican Experience
- Features from exhibitions of Guild Membership

There are currently forty-five Artists displayed on the website. The Guild currently has approximately ten more artists who are currently preparing their work to be displayed.

### **3) Results Achieved**

Now that the website is up and running, members of the guild are finally beginning to take notice and have begun preparing their work for display. This is new experience and with most of the members not computer literate it has taken both education and coaxing to get a wider level of participation.

The website has also allowed for those members who initially took part in the project to promote their work more widely. An example of this came from the Devon House Christmas show experience when several new artists became aware of the site and contacted the Guild for inclusion . This alone expanded our paying base by at least five artists.

Sales on the site are slow in coming but the expectation is that as we continue to promote it, the recognition of the international art community will peak. At the moment members of the Guild use the site to direct perspective international buyers and galleries to the scope of their work.

The Guild has used the site to interest international promoting interests such as Frame by Frame to interview Jamaican artist for their feature “Island Stylee” which is shown on Air Jamaica and which will be used by marketing groups to promote Jamaican Tourism and Culture. The Guild has also done a radio interview with Radio Mona to talk about its recent activities. An advertising specialist Sanja Williams has designed a brochure and poster for the Guild. The brochure and poster will be circulated by all members at guild events. All the above combined will serve to publicize the JACG's website

The Guild has not a fixed dollar value on the revenue from the site to date. The Finance committee is in the process of developing a business plan that will direct the management of the site The members of this committee are Wayne Lawrence-Director, Elpedio Robinson- Accountant, Sonia Richards-Treasurer and Sharon Fox-Mould- President.

The update of the site which we are currently working on will include a live video interview with Barrington Watson at his home in Orange Park, St. Thomas. This interview contains a guided tour of his studio and an animated discussion on his life experiences and where he would like to see Jamaican Art and Artists in the future. The production is already in the editing stage and will be uploaded in the up coming weeks.

The USAID launch was influential in earning the Guild a second glance from many recognized artists. As a direct result the Guild has been offered a small gallery space in the now renovated Oakton Park Entertainment Center. The expected opening date will coincide with the launch of our opening show.

## 4) Lessons Learned

One of the major hurdles the Guild has faced in the implementation of the site is getting its members to understand the rules that have to be in place so ensure smooth operation. One such hurdle is realizing that if one offers prints then these prints have to be of a certain standard, numbered signed and bear certificates of authenticity. Secondly that if an original is offered on the site then it should be held for a period of time so that if sold it is available. Educating artists as to the benefits of using the website has not proved difficult, however teaching the science of proper print making and reliability of supply together with the need for accurate descriptions and affordable pricing has proved to be a challenge.

## 5) Sustainability

Guild members have decided that Valencia Wright, an accomplished artist and educator has the current skills sets to coordinate all aspects of the site. As mentioned before the Guild operated on a volunteer basis so initially Valencia will be a volunteer. The finance committee has put in place a revenue stream which will allow the Guild to begin using a small amount of the revenue earned by the site to compensate the coordinator.

Digital Technology Inc. has agreed to fully train two Guild members as well as provide the software to enable the Guild to maintain the site. The Guild has taken active steps to attain computer equipment for this maintenance.

Funds will also be derived from members who wish to update their biographies, change display, and advertise current exhibitions. The Guild will also charge artists a thirty three percent service charge for the sale of any item sold on the site. This rate is consistent with the rate charged by most galleries and we hope to be able to reduce the charges to members as revenue increases. These funds will be used to cover maintenance cost, hosting costs, promotion and advertising and computer maintenance costs.

### **Anticipated Website Expenditure US \$**

Annual hosting cost	\$ 400.00
Maintenance costs	\$ 1,000.00
Promotion	\$ 2,000.00
Est. Total	\$ 3,400.00

### **Anticipated Revenue US\$**

Artist changes	\$ 3,000.00
Advertising	\$ 390.00
E-commerce	\$ 2,100.00
Frame by Frame	\$ 5,000.00
(Complementary promo)	
Est. Total	\$10,490.00
Anticipated Profits	\$ 7,090.00

These estimates demonstrate that the guild will be able to manage the cost of continuing the development and marketing the website.

## **Future Use of the Website**

The Guild hopes that in the future the website will allow for greater communication between itself and its membership as well as communication between the Jamaican artists and artists groups world wide. We feel that this will enable us to acquire knowledge of the use of new technology, media and trends.

The website will also be used as a vehicle for education, allowing members to share information on their work and style as well as promote workshops sponsored by the Guild. This will operate much like an on-line art magazine and news letter.

Through international linkages the Guild also hopes to host international exhibitions in its gallery as well as to secure opportunities for it's members to have international exposure. This reciprocal relationship will further raise the standard of work by our local artists as well as broaden their horizons.

**Contact:   Mrs. Sharon Fox-Mould – President JACG (2004 -2006)**  
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                  **Sonia Richards – Treasurer**  
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